

Message Text

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11
ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 FAA-00 CAB-02

DOTE-00 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00 /050 W
----- 072706

R 300712Z JUL 76
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6104
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHA
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMCONSUL KADUNA
AMCONSUL IBADAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CGEN, EAIR, CASC, PINS, DM, NI
SUBJECT: ALLEGED UNCLEARED OVERFLIGHT

REF: COTONOU 1224 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED AIRCRAFT MENTIONED REFTEL HAVE U.S. CIVIL REGISTRATION BUT ARE OWNED BY ZAIRE AIR FORCE AND WERE BEING FERRIED FROM CESSNA FRENCH SUBSIDIARY BY BRITISH COMPANY TO KINSHAS. PILOTS ARE TWO ENGLISHMEN AND ONE FRENCHMAN. PLANES LANDED JULY 12 AT UGHELLI, NIGERIA, AND WERE IMPOUNDED BY NIGERIA POLICE. PILOTS ARRESTED. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIALS USE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION NOW SEEKING CONSULAR ACCESS TO ITS NATIONALS. PLANES APPARENTLY HAD CLEARANCE TO LAND PORT HARCOURT OR LAGOS: BUT THIS HAS BEEN OBSCURED, PERHAPS DELIBERATELY, IN NIGERIAN BUREAUCRATIC MUDDLE. END SUMMARY.

1. THREE CESSNA PLANES WHICH ALLEGEDLY VIOLATED BENINESE AIRSPACE HAVE U.S. CIVIL REGISTRATION BUT ARE OWNED BY ZAIRE
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AIR FORCE AND WERE BEING FERRIED FROM CESSNA FRENCH SUBSIDIARY IN

REIMS BY BRITISH FIRM, MINDACRE, OF BUNGAY, SUFFOK TO KINSHASA. AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL REQUIREMENTS WERE BEING HANDLED BY SAXON SAFARI, AYRSHIRE, UK. PILOTS ARE TWO ENGLISHMEN AND ONE FRENCHMAN. PLANES MADE PRECAUTIONARY LANDING JULY 12 AT UGHELLI, BENDEL STATE, NIGERIA, AND WERE IMPOUNDED BY NIGERIA POLICE. NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS JULY 15 DESCRIBED CESSNAS AS "MYSTERY PLANES" AND GAVE INCIDENT CLOAK AND DAGGER ATMOSPHERE, ANOTHER IN SERIES OF SPY STORIES SUCH AS GUTHRIE-SPRIGGS CASE AND FIRE-ARMS POSSESSION CASE OF AUSTRALIAN PILOT THAT PAPERS INSIST ON CALLING AN AMERICAN. PILOTS NOW UNDER HOTEL ARREST IN BENIN CITY, BEING TREATED WELL, BUT SUBJECTED TO "SOPHISTICATED AND CLEVER" INTERROGATION AND KEPT UNDER CONSTANT ESCORT. SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS REPORTEDLY REBUKED ESCORT FOR ALLOWING ONE OF PILOTS TO HAVE DRINK WITH ANOTHER BRITISH NATIONAL STAYING AT HOTEL. ONE OF PILOTS DESCRIBED AS EXPERIENCED, THE OTHERS AS VERY YOUNG. STRAIN IN BEGINNING TO TELL ON YOUNGER PILOTS. PILOTS WORRIED THAT PLANES WILL DETERIORATE AT UGHELLI FOR LACK OF MAINTENANCE, BUT NIGERIANS REFUSE TO LET THEM BE MOVED. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION IS SEEKING CONSULAR ACCESS TO ITS NATIONALS.

2. BRITISH HICOMM SOURCE SAYS PLANES HAD PROPER CLEARANCES FROM NIGERIA BUT KNOWS NOTHING OF BENIN. PLANES WERE ORIGINALLY CLEARED TO LAND AT PORT HARCOURT, BUT NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES SWITCHED CLEARANCE TO LAGOS. CONTROLLER ATTEMPTED NOTIFY PILOTS OF THIS CHANGE BY RADIO WHILE PLANES AIRBORNE, BUT APPARENTLY DID NOT GET THROUGH. PLANES MADE PRECAUTIONARY LANDING AT UGHELLI BECAUSE OF LOW CLOUDS AND RADIO TROUBLE. NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES WERE APPARENTLY THROWN INTO MUDDLE, THINKING CESSANS HAD APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE. BUTHJIVIL AVIATION MINISTRY OFFICIAL ON SCENE, WHEN ASKED BY POLICE IF CIVAV KNEW OF PLANES, REPORTEDLY REPLIED "OH YES, WE KNEW THEY WERE COMING." THIS APPARENTLY DID NOT REGISTER WITH POLICE OR WAS DELIBERATELY IGNORED. THEN PORT HARCOURT FOR UNKNOWN REASON DENIED KNOWLEDGE OF PILOTS' INTENTION TO LAND THERE, DENIED CLEARANCE HAD BEEN GRANTED.

3. BRITISH BELIEVE THAT POLICE MAY SUDDENLY ANNOUNCE CASE IS CLEARED UP, PILOTS ARE FREE, HENCE CONSULAR ACCESS IS NO LONGER NECESSARY. THIS WOULD OBVIATE HASSLE OF EITHER DENYING BRITISH CONSULAR ACCESS OR ALLOWING BRITS TO COME AND INSPECT NIGERIAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SNAFU. EMBASSY BELIEVES BRITS NOT RECKONING REALISTICALLY WITH STUBBORNNESS OF NIGERIA POLICE. UNLIKE AMEMBASSY, THEY HAVE APPARENTLY NOT BEEN DENIED CONSULAR ACCESS IN LAST FEW MONTHS.

4. NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT RPT NOT RAISED MATTER OF PLANES' U.S. REGISTRATION WITH EMBASSY, AND EMBASSY HAD NOT REPORTED INCIDENT BECAUSE WE KNEW OF NO AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT. PILOTS' STORY THAT THEY LANDED BECAUSE OF RADIO TROUBLE COULD ACCOUNT

FOR THEIR NOT ANSWERING COTONOU CONTROL TOWER. IT WOULD BE
ENLIGHTENING TO KNOW HOW BENINOIS AUTHORITIES OBTAINED REGIS-
TRATION NUMBERS OF AIRCRAFT. WERE THEY PROVIDED BY LOME CONTROL
OR BY NIGERIANS?
CAHILL

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